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## Joint Worship Among Religions\*

Joint worship (*kyōdō reihai* 共同礼拝) is the general term for a religious service (*gyōji* 行事) or religious ritual (liturgy, *shikiten* 式典) conducted together by at least two religions or religious groups. In former times, even within Christianity it was difficult to perform together worship, not only between Catholics and Protestants, but even among different Protestant denominations. Such difficulty continues also today, but gradually it may be solved. Originally being one, these denominations split through diverse processes, so one could assume that essentially joint worship should be a possibility. Concerning mutual relationships between differing religions, even when they have fundamentally big differences, they are able to cooperate and be partners in issues of secular society, but up to now one hardly can imagine that they could conduct joint worship. But in the present situation the number of religions coexisting in each place of our world is increasing, therefore attempts to develop various forms of joint worship are continuously going on.

In 1986, Pope John Paul II. (in office 1978-2005) suggested that religious representatives of different areas of the world should come together in order to pray for peace on earth. Even though it is difficult for members of differing religions to “pray together,” it was supposed that they would be able to “come together” in order to pray according to each one’s specific way – this was important and such was the proposal. About hundred representatives of religions responded to the invitation and gathered from the whole world in Assisi. It was no conference, debate or the like, also no text of a declaration or an appeal was produced; it was entirely a meeting for prayer. Until that time, all kinds of interreligious dialogue or cooperation were conducted, but to meet together in order only to pray was an epoch-making event and caused huge stimulation in the religious world.

From Japan, the Tendai Chief Abbot Yamada Etai (1895-1994) had participated in the meeting in Assisi and had been deeply impressed. Therefore he developed the project “Religious Summit Meeting on Mt. Hiei” and invited members of various religions in Japan as well as representatives of religions from overseas in 1987. This meeting inherited the spirit of Assisi, and – together with conversations for the sake of peace – it proceeded one step further than Assisi by envisaging joint prayer as

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\* *Sho-shūkyō to no kyōdō reihai* 諸宗教との共同礼拝. Translation from: *Kirisuto-kyō reihai – reihai-gaku jiten* キリスト教礼拝・礼拝学事典 (Dictionary for Christian worship and worship studies). Tokyo: Nihon Kirisuto-kyōdan shuppan-kyoku 2006, pp. 182-184. Footnotes of this article were added by the translator.



well. However, from within Buddhism doubts were raised concerning the practice of “prayer,”<sup>1</sup> and from the Japanese religious world criticism was voiced that the critical self-reflection concerning World War II was thin and that therefore prayer for real peace had to be questioned. Afterwards, such kind of summit came to be held annually in form of a commemoration for which representatives of different religions came together; they urged a way of thinking to conduct joint rituals (*kyōdō shikiten*) and joint services (*kyōdō gyōji*) for peace, and such summits continuously helped to make this practice widely known.

Such joint ritual was proposed in Japan earlier by Oomoto-kyō 大本教 (the proper name is Oomoto); it proceeded with practice and experiment. Gaining the interest of the Episcopal (Anglican) Church and collecting contacts, in 1977 already, a Christian worship was conducted in Oomoto’s main sanctuary, whereby Christians sat besides Oomoto believers, and together they sang Christian hymns. Later, the program of the ceremony also contained Koto music performed by Oomoto believers, but the title and also the contents were called “Christian worship liturgy” (*kirisuto-kyō reihai-shiki* キリスト教礼拝式). Before already, Oomoto had conducted its own worship in American churches several times. On the basis of these experiences, in 1981 Oomoto performed a “joint worship ceremony” (*gōdō reihai-shiki* 合同礼拝式) together with representatives of Shintō, Buddhism, Islam and Christianity (Episcopal Church) under the theme “Prayer for peace” (or “Peace invocation,” *heiwa kigan* 平和祈願) in its own sanctuary.<sup>2</sup>

Oomoto’s attempts were in their time pioneering and something experimental; the participants were not necessarily official representatives of their religion or religious group; formally they participated as interested individuals. Raising concerns about mixing (or blending) without rule is important, but in the age of globalisation we should not think light of the spirit of experiment.

Until now our deliberations proceeded from interreligious dialogue and cooperation and aimed at possibilities of “gathering in order to pray” and “praying together” regarding “peace,” a theme the whole humankind is facing equally. However, in case of joint worship (*kyōdō reihai*) and joint religious ceremony (*kyōdō shūkyō gyōji*) there still exists one more dimension. The situation is that in

1. I.e. the question, whether prayer is an acceptable Buddhist practice or not.
2. In 1975, Oomoto performed its Shintō ceremonies in the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, New York, and in the Grace Cathedral, San Francisco; 1977 it did the same also in the Vatican. Joint worship services by Oomoto and the Episcopal Church occurred in 1977 and 1979. A Hindu-Buddhist-Oomoto joint worship was organized 1978 in Kathmandu and 1979 in Lumbini, and a joint prayer for peace meeting was performed in 1979 on Mt. Sinai together with representatives of Judaism, Islam and Christianity. (Oomoto Foundation, *Bankyo Dokon – Seventy Years of Inter-Religious Activity at Oomoto*. Kameoka 1997: 51 f)

our real society are events, whether we agree or not, which urge us to act together. When natural disasters occur, such as earthquakes and floods, and accidents, such as sinking of a ship or the crash of an airplane, many people lose their life in one moment. The situation is today that in such cases people of different religions are affected. Therefore it is desirable that a mourning service for the victims is conducted, bound together by one such event, as a joint ceremony of different religions.

Whereas in such case in Japan non- or a-religious forms are predominant in order to avoid bias against a certain religion, in Europe and America joint services with representatives of different religions attending are increasing. Recently, the joint mourning service conducted for the victims of the terror attack on the World Trade Center in New York September 23, 2001 gained much attention. Christians, Jews, Muslims and Sikhs participated, officials of each religion read from their sacred scripture, said prayers, held a sermon and sang hymns. (However, in these ceremonies each religion maintained the own identity; it was neither a joint mourning service for the dead in the sense of melting different religions and transforming them into one single religion of the American people, who would pray for the nation's interest, nor became it a means to serve the advantage of a religious group.)

After World War II, mourning services in Japan are conducted in forms from which religious elements were extracted, probably because of reflections about the bitter experience of the time of State Shintō. Representative for such a ceremony is the mourning ceremony for the war dead performed by the government every year on August 15. However, among such mourning ceremonies for the war dead conducted by prefectures, cities and villages one can discover sometimes also the form of joint worship. In Kanagawa prefecture, e.g., every year the prefecture conducts a service in the memorial hall for the war dead of the prefecture in which also the governor participates; however, before this public service is performed, a religious ceremony is conducted by officials of different religions. The composition of the religious elements seems to change each year. According to the example of one year, Tenri-kyō members contributed with ceremonial court music, Shintō priests with a purification ritual, Christian ministers with Bible reading and Buddhist priests with sutra chanting.

Besides the form, in which a number of religions participate at the same time, exists also another form, in which all religions participate jointly according to a rotation system, that is, e.g., in one year it is conducted in a Buddhist form, and in the next year in a Christian form. In Chidorigafuchi in Tokyo, the national cemetery for the war dead of World War II, a number of religions and religious groups perform mourning service every year on August 15 at different times during the day so that the ceremonies do not overlap or look as if they were performed jointly.

In case of non- or a-religious ceremonies, because each individual participant's religion is not negated, the participants may mourn according to their own religious conviction. In that sense one can consider this also as a joint religious ceremony. This means that what was said about the mourning services of groups is also valid for the funeral service or memorial service in non- or a-religious forms.

What about the funeral (or memorial service) performed by a certain religion? Of course, funerals where people of only one religion participate are few today. Especially in Japan and other countries, there are many cases that Christians attend the funeral of another religion. In such a case, he or she expresses respect towards the religious ceremonial form of the chief mourner or chief organizer, and respects also the order of the ritual without abandoning the own religion. In case of a Christian form of a funeral, members of different religions will attend. Such people mourn the dead person of a different religion. A funeral (or memorial service) in a multireligious situation over the time will receive automatically elements of a joint worship.

Deep changes occur today, worldwide we are caught in the rapid process of a religious pluralisation. In such a situation religions cannot claim anymore that they are independent from each other. Exchange and cooperation among religions are proceeding, and in the midst of such processes the possibilities and necessities of joint worships are born. Exchange and partnership (or fellowship) carry the danger of mixing and of losing the own subjecthood. On the other hand, in the midst of coexistence with other religions, the new perspective opens that the own specific identity becomes clearer.

*Translation by Martin Repp*